

Rep. Bruce Westerman AR-04

I want to thank the Joint Select Committee for hosting this session to obtain input from Members on the current budget and appropriations processes.

I am deeply troubled by current levels of federal outlays, and appreciate the opportunity to share my concerns with you today.

Federal government spending is out of control.

Unlike state spending, which is limited to the money collected from taxes, federal spending is permitted to vastly exceed income—and, indeed, it does.

In April, CBO released its annual Budget and Economic Outlook, the 10-year economic forecast based on projected costs of current legislation.

Economists at CBO predict that overall spending will reach \$56.6 trillion over the ten-year period from 2018-2028, ultimately exceeding 23 percent of GDP.

In 2028, mandatory spending is expected to reach 64 percent of total federal expenditures—up from 28 percent in 1968.

Due to this obscene level of spending, budget deficits will continue growing at ever-increasing rates.

Altogether, deficits are likely to average 4.9 percent of GDP—significantly greater than the projected average economic growth rate of less than 4 percent.

And as the nation's debt increases, so will interest payments.

Annual interest payments are slated to reach \$915 billion by 2028—three and a half times what we spent on our debt in FY 2017.

They are expected to become our third largest financial obligation by the year 2025, surpassing spending on defense, Medicaid, and Social Security Disability payments.

Deficit spending is easy.

Balancing a budget is hard.

It requires tough decisions that many of us do not wish to make, and decisions that will inevitably upset certain individuals.

But at some point, these decisions will have to be made.

We simply cannot continue spending beyond our means.

It is in our nation's best interest to set priorities now—while we have time to evaluate options and process decisions—instead of waiting for the day our ability to borrow money ceases to exist.

Congress must set a higher standard for itself.

We owe it to our children and grandchildren, and all those who hope for a bright future in our country.

Contrary to the assertions of some, a plan to balance the budget would not eliminate the ability of Congress to appropriately respond to changes in the economy, natural disasters, or security threats.

In fact, balancing the budget within 10 years is achievable even without slashing appropriations to government programs.

We must simply slow the rate at which our spending has been growing, and is projected to grow.

If Congress operated as was originally intended—by passing a budget each spring and appropriations bills each summer—such measures might not be necessary.

But regular order has not been seen on the Senate side in years.

For too long, elected officials have placed their short-term interests above the best interests of Americans, doing what is easiest personally and most comfortable politically instead of making evidence-based decisions yielding long-term benefits.

Consider omnibus spending bills, for example.

I am incredibly frustrated by the use of omnibus bills as bargaining chips to pass so many laws that do not appropriate funds, drawing emphasis away from Congress's duty to regulate spending.

This is not in line with the desire of our forefathers, who intended spending bills to be carefully considered and debated individually.

If you remember only one thing I say today, please let it be this: I believe this committee has the ability—and, in fact, the obligation—to

put forth solutions promoting regular order and reigning in the growth of federal spending.

As a Member of the House Budget Committee, I will support you in efforts to do so, and I am here to lend whatever resources or assistance I am able.